

ARTICLE APPEARED
CN PAGE B-14

NEW YORK TIMES
5 April 1984

President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Issues

Mining Off Nicaragua

Q. Mr. President, recently the U. S.-backed opponents of the Sandinista regime have gone beyond their warfare on land to mining ports off the Nicaraguan coast. Are you concerned that these mines there, which neutral freighters or others could hit, run a risk of widening the war in Central America? And do you think there's any point at which we ought to try to call a halt to the activity of the Contras?

A. No, our interest in Nicaragua — I'm not going to comment on that one way or the other, or the tactics that are used in a war of that kind — our interest in Nicaragua is one and one only: The present government of Nicaragua is exporting revolution to El Salvador, its neighbor, and is helping, supporting and arming and training the guerrillas that are trying to overthrow a duly elected government. And as long as they do that, we're going to try and inconvenience that government of Nicaragua until they quit that kind of action.

Q. I'd like to follow up, sir. We are training troops down there in Honduras. Do you see, from your perspective, a danger of a wider war in Central America at this point?

A. No, I think these maneuvers are something we've done before. They're not something unusual or aimed at anyone down there. They are combined exercises that we hold with our own units, and when one unit goes through some of these and gets the training we send another one down to do the same thing and that's all they are is war games.

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